

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

Sub 3 1. Footwear for protecting a foot comprising:

2 an upper defining an opening, the upper including:

3 an instep portion to cover a metatarsal section of the foot,

4 an elastic instep guard positioned on the instep portion to protect the metatarsal
5 section of the foot, the instep guard including an elastic support having a plurality of hollow
6 passages, and

7 a steel toe for protecting a toe region of the foot; and

8 an outsole attached to the upper to define a cavity that receives the foot through the
9 opening.

Sub 2 2. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the instep guard includes:

1 a first sheet; and

2 a plurality of support members extending from the first sheet to define the plurality of the
3 hollow passages.
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1 3. The footwear of claim 2, wherein the instep guard further comprises a second sheet
2 connected to the first sheet by the support members.

Sub 4 1 4. The footwear of claim 1, wherein at least some of the plurality of holes are defined by the
2 first sheet and the support members.

1 5. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the hollow passages are filled with air.

1 6. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the hollow passages are elongated.

1 7. The footwear of claim 1, wherein at least one of the elongated hollow passages has cross-
2 section that is either circular, ovoid, or triangular in shape.

1 8. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the support members define a first type of elongated
2 passage with a first cross-section shape and a second type of elongated passage with a second
3 cross-section shape.

1 9. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the instep guard includes a resilient material.

1 10. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the instep guard is positioned on an underside of the
2 instep portion of the footwear.

1 11. The footwear of claim 10, further comprising:

2 a liner positioned beneath the instep portion of the footwear, the instep guard being
3 positioned between the instep portion and the liner;

4 stitching around the instep guard attaching the liner to the instep portion.

1 12. The footwear of claim 11, further comprising:

2 a steel toe positioned on a toe portion of the upper, the instep guard being attached to the
3 toe portion.

1 13. An instep guard for use in an instep section of footwear to protect the metatarsals of a
2 foot, the instep guard comprising:

3 an elastic support having a shape and size commensurate with the instep section of the
4 footwear, the elastic support having a plurality of hollow passages.

1 14. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the elastic support includes:

2 a first sheet; and

3 a plurality of support members extending from the first sheet to define the plurality of the
4 hollow passages.

1 15. The instep guard of claim 13 further comprising a second sheet connected to the first
2 sheet by the plurality of support members.

1 16. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein at least some of the plurality of holes are defined
2 by the first sheet and the support members.

1 17. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the hollow passages are filled with air.

1 18. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the hollow passages are elongated.

1 19. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein at least one of the elongated hollow passages has
2 cross-section that is either circular, ovoid, or triangular in shape.

1 20. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the support members define a first type of
2 elongated passage with a first cross-section shape and a second type of elongated passage
3 with a second cross-section shape.

1 21. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the elastic support includes a resilient material.

1 22. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the elastic support is positioned between the instep
2 portion of the footwear and a liner of the footwear.

1 23. Footwear for protecting a foot comprising:

2 an upper defining an opening, the upper including:

3 an instep portion to cover a metatarsal section of the foot, and

4 an elastic instep guard positioned on the instep portion to protect the metatarsal
5 section of the foot, the instep guard including an elastic support having a plurality of hollow
6 passages; and

7 an outsole attached to the upper to define a cavity that receives the foot through the
8 opening.

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